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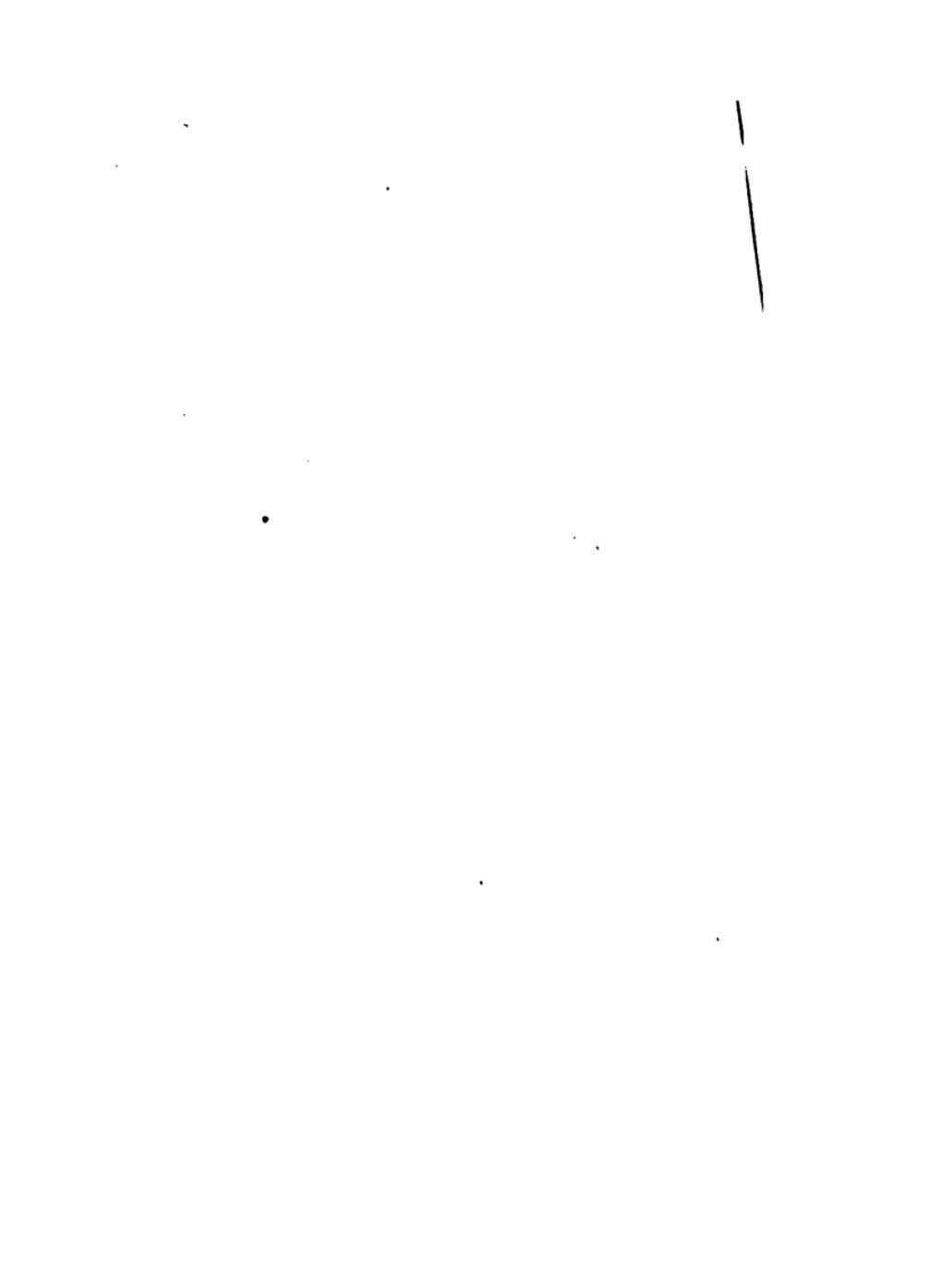
HEART HEALING

CARPENTER









HEART HEALING.



HEART HEALING.

BY THE

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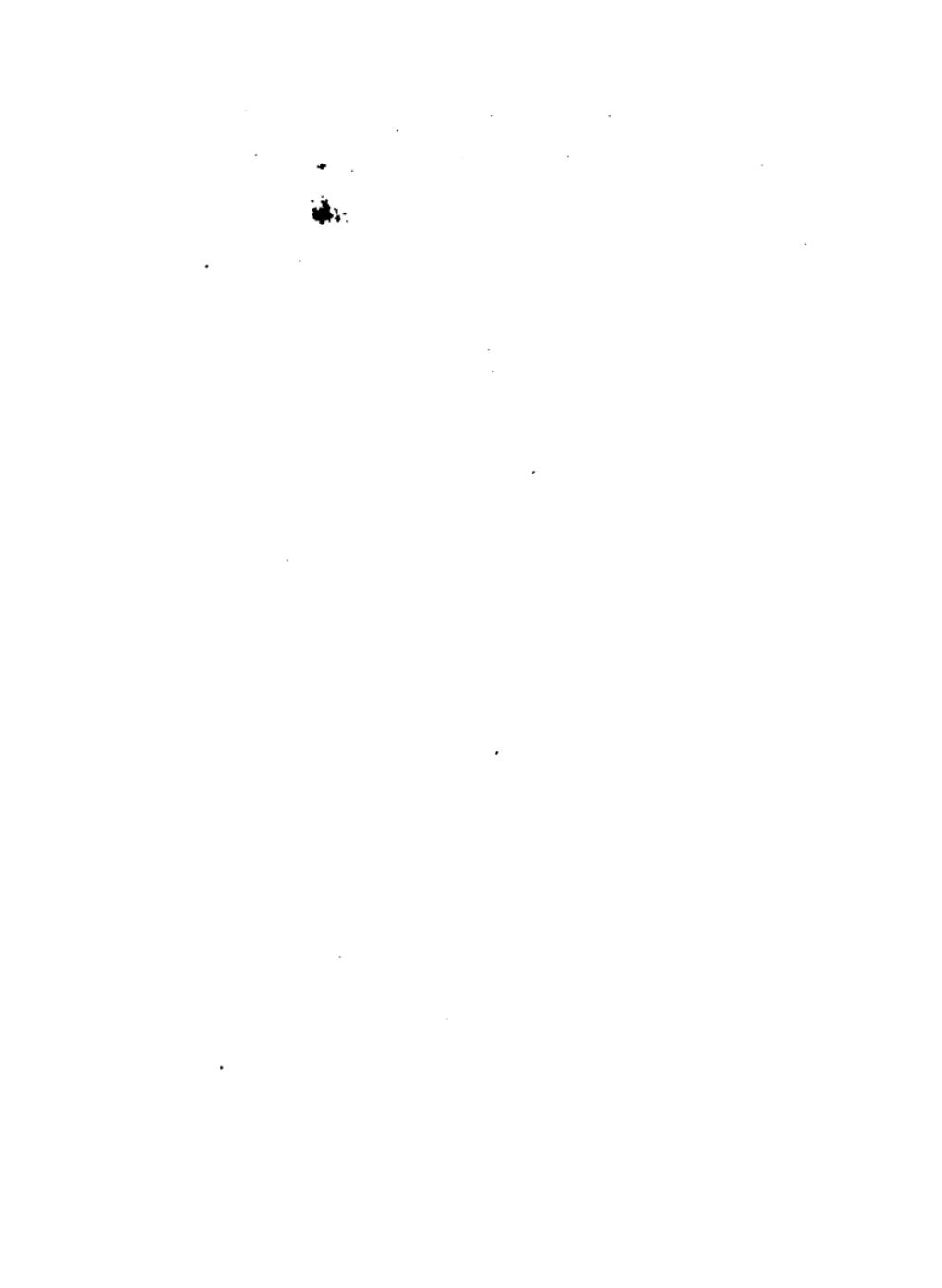
'I will heal their backsliding.—Hos. xiv. 4.



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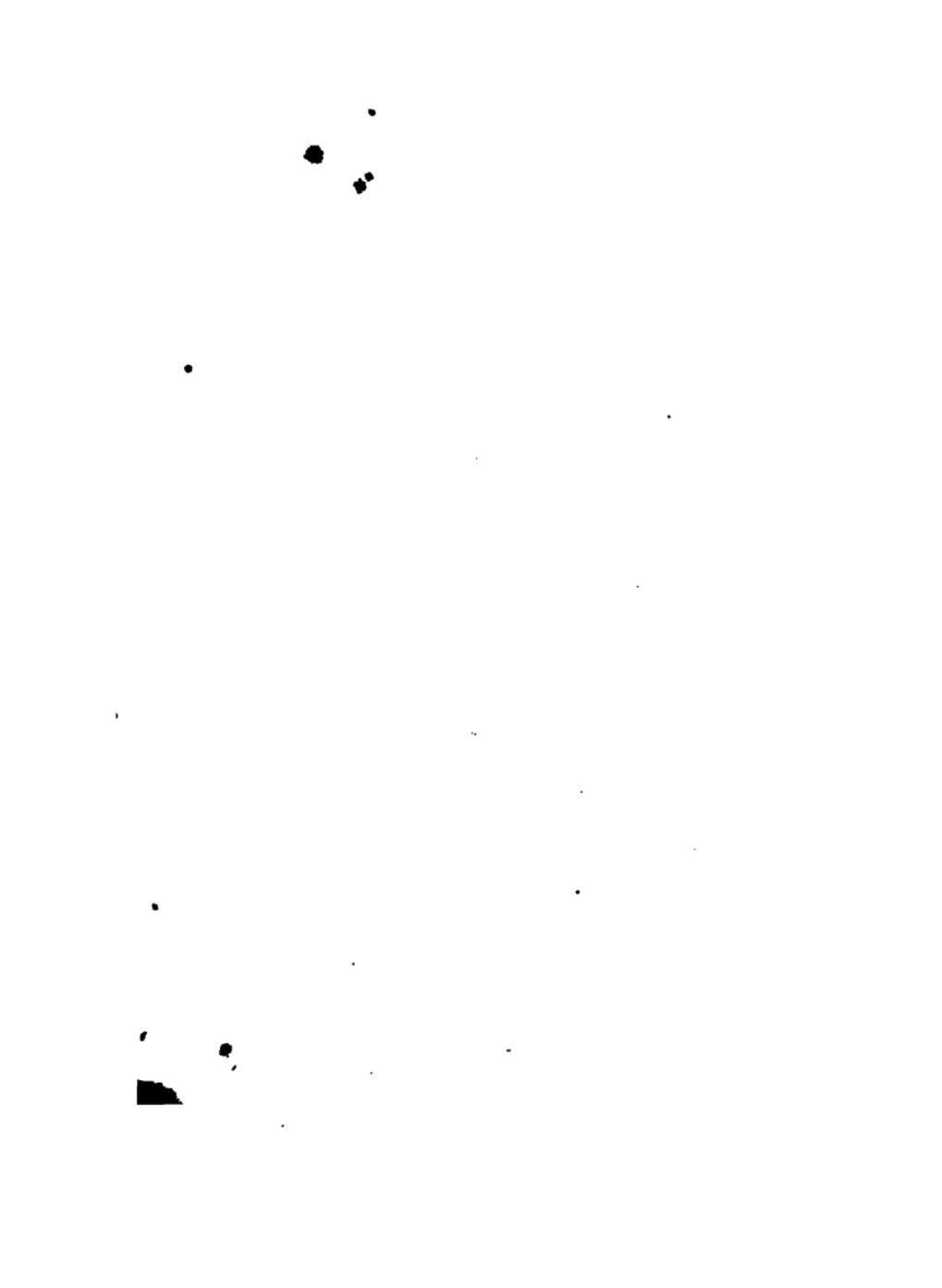
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HEART-HEALING.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY—THE DISEASE.

THERE is no subject which has given rise to more heart-paining questionings and misty answers as that of the existence of evil. Evil is among us, and as men, patriots, and philanthropists, we must deplore it. But laments do not bring explanations. The dark problem has baffled human thought, and bewildered conjecture.

What has the Bible, as conveying to us the knowledge of God's will and our destiny, to say in explanation of this dark and undecipherable subject? Evil

is too gigantic, too universal, and too deeply rooted in the world to be passed by unnoticed in a revelation from heaven. We have long wondered how a good God could permit its existence. There are the miseries of our fellow-creatures aggravated in intensity alike in the innocent and the guilty ; there are terrible calamities which startle the quiescence of the most indifferent into terror and alarm ; there are killing heart-sores which drain away our courage and go far to exhaust our hopes ; there are evils which afflict our race, our country, our friends, ourselves. We have long yearned for their solution : now God Himself has spoken. What grieves the compassion, and stirs the emotions of our hearts, must touch the tenderness of His. He will supply the key, He will not suffer us so long to weary ourselves with speculation, and fret our spirit with unanswered cravings. To His word we turn.

But in turning to the Book, we are struck by the fact that we have entered a different and a fresher atmosphere. Here we find little that touches on the problem of the origin of evil. We are not taken by the hand, and led to the far distance, and shown the little dark drops as they ooze forth from their primal source. We are entertained with no elaborate treatise on the subject ; there is no nervous attempt to vindicate the Almighty from being the author of evil ; no metaphysical chapters are introduced ; no philosophical methods are indulged. The atmosphere into which we enter is not that of the schools ; the jargon of the hair-splitters is left behind us ; we breathe new air ; we hear new sounds. Fact takes the place of fancy ; historical details appear instead of dreamy speculations. We have left the speculative, and we have passed into the region of the practical ; we are no longer bewildered amid the tortuous

labyrinths of wearisome, indefinite, and often contradictory conjectures. Instead of this we are presented with a story which unfolds to us not the origin of evil, but the sin of man. Every reader of the Bible must have noticed that the sacred writers pause but seldom, and touch but lightly, on the speculative questions which are inseparable from religious thought, while they deal most minutely, and warn most earnestly, on the actual sins and inherent sinfulness of man; and the reason is plain, they were philanthropists rather than philosophers; they were men, and not dialecticians.

This fact is enough to account for the aversion with which some regard the sacred writings. As long as the origin of the evil remains in the regions of speculation, and can be taken up and discussed to stimulate active thought without making a demand upon the life; as long as it may be thought and rea-

sioned over without reaching the conscience ; so long, and in such a degree, it is interesting to mankind. As long as the subject may be viewed as one in which the clouds and darkness which veil the Father's face are remembered and criticized, but the darkness of personal transgression forgotten or ignored ; as long as man appears in the representation only as unfortunate, and not as guilty, so long the subject is fascinating. But when once a more practical and personal tone is given to it, and the speculative aspects are thrown into the background, then much of the keen interest is lost, and the discussion begins to languish. We do not altogether object to the position of victims ; there is a morbid, self-righteous pleasure in reckoning ourselves as such ; but we do totally and entirely dislike the notion of being arraigned as sinners, and we shrink from the topic when its bearings upon ourselves are brought into view.

This reluctance to deal with the practical and personal question might of itself suggest to us that all is not right. One of the well-known features of certain diseases is the tendency exhibited by the victim to shrink from any examination. The wise and keen-sighted physician who detects that reluctance will be confirmed in his determination to ascertain the truth; his suspicions are strengthened by the vehement denials of the patient; there is something wrong; some deep-seated mischief is at work, and remedies sharp and searching are needed to arrest the swift and hidden enemy who is making havoc of the system. It is folly to bandy words with the physician, and to lead him away in discursive talk about the theory of disease. Even while you speak the unnatural flush upon the cheek shows how the nervous, beating heart dreads a return to inquiries, which might discover the deep-seated cancer, or the unnatural

and life-eating organism. In many cases the reluctance to touch upon the question of evil in man is the reluctance of dread. Conscience has given signs of alarm, and though time and occupation have combined to film over the spiritual vision, yet the instincts of conscience, though dormant, are not dead. It is said that straw which had been used for the bedding of the lions at Wombwell's Menagerie was sold, and placed in a stable as bedding for some horses. No sooner did the horses enter than they began to show signs of alarm, snorting, snuffing the air, and trembling as though conscious of a threatening presence. Horses in this country have had no experience of the hostility or strength of carnivora; but there is a persistency in hereditary powers, which certain objects can stimulate into activity. The conscience of man exhibits a similar persistency of sense, if not by self-reproach or remorse, at least by a reluctance to

enter on the consideration of sin. It is not too much to infer that all is not right, when pain, alarm, aversion, are felt when inquiry is suggested.

Such inquiry the Book of God does suggest. Passing over the question of how evil originated, the prophets, evangelists, and apostles, press upon us the question of human sin. The problem with them is not how evil came into the world, but how it is to be got rid of. We may say with approximate truth, that in the Bible view sin is the only evil. And it is universal; all, without distinction of race, rank, or sex, are involved in this common misery. Like a disease or pestilence it has laid hold upon all, rich and poor, old and young, strong and feeble. Like the frogs of Egypt it is met with at every turn. Every pleasure is shadowed with it, and even our rest haunted by it. It leaps into hideous view amid the choice *dainties of life*; its discordant clamour

robs us of repose. It darkens all heaven to our view, and poisons all earth to our taste. Like the clouds above us, no glimpse of the celestial is unblotted by their presence. We turn earthwards, and delve in hard toil, hoping to find at length the refreshing springs of unalloyed and heart-satisfying enjoyment; but where the water bubbles forth, lo! it is blood-stained with sin as the streams of Egypt. Like the ancient heroes landing on the new-found shore, we go to gather fair garlands and fair flowers to celebrate the festival of rest after laborious voyaging; but the branch we strip from the tree drops a sap reddened with the memorials of sin.

‘Not far, a rising hillock stood in view :
Sharp myrtles, on the sides, and cornels grew,
There while I went to crop the sylvan scenes,
And shade an altar with their leafy greens,
I pull’d a plant—with horror I relate
A prodigy so strange, and full of fate—

The rooted fibres rose ; and from the wound,
Black, bloody drops distilled upon the ground.
Mute and amazed, my hair with terror stood ;
Fear shrunk my sinews, and congealed my
blood.

Manned once again, another plant I try :
That other gushed with this same sanguine
dye.' *Dryden's Virgil, Æn. iii. 32-43.*

Thus the tokens of evil meet us on all sides ; though we wash our hands with water fresh melted from the pure snows of heaven, yet a stain will be found on the first flower we gather. The generous action, which we regarded with such complacency, dissatisfies us when we analyse it more carefully : there was a touch of selfishness in it which we did not notice at first. Everywhere this evil, sin, mingles with the good : it cleaves to us with obstinate pertinacity : it follows us with tireless feet. To ignore its presence is folly ; to deny its evil is self-deception ; to forget its

virulence, and its wide-spreading infectiousness, is madness. To see what it is, whence its power, and how to remove or remedy it, is to make some advance towards heart-peace and heavenly hope.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE OF THE DISEASE.

WE shall endeavour, in this chapter, to draw out some of the aspects of sin that we may the better realize the nature of that malady which afflicts our race.

I. The most ordinary conception of sin is that which represents it as the breaking of some will or commandment of God. It is the most ordinary, for it is the way in which our earliest experiences presented it to our minds. Our first knowledge of good and evil appears to be drawn from the existence of some rule. As children we were under rules: to break any of them was to do wrong. *This* was per-

mitted : *that* was prohibited. The hues of law tinged our earliest notions of right and wrong. Social experience rather confirmed the notion. Everywhere we found ourselves the subjects of *laws*, laws of society, laws of legislature ; laws, civil and criminal, brought every offence to be regarded as the breach of such law. This aspect of sin is clearly in harmony with the divine teaching. Sin is the transgression of the law, says St. John. But there is a tendency when an object is viewed only from one side to gain a very straitened and flat idea of it. Too often the word, sin, calls up only the notion of some overt act of transgression. Murder, theft, violence, fraud, falsehood, flit through our minds at the mention of sin. These, indeed, are the grosser and more obvious signs of sin, but the veriest tyro in Scripture knowledge will pierce to a deeper view of sin than this.

II. Christ Himself spiritualized the

application of the law. Its transgression was not to be looked for in the open act only, but in the hidden thought. The secret hate, the wrathful emotion, the loose fancy, and unchaste desire constituted a breach of the law. This opened a new field of inquiry. The evil was working deep below the surface. The sepulchre might be white and stainless stone, gracefully carved and richly adorned ; but within the seeds of corruption and the hideous relics of death would be found. A man might mingle among his fellows as an agreeable companion, a firm friend, an esteemed and virtuous citizen, and a zealous philanthropist. His liberal gifts might be applauded by the rich ; and the hand that bestowed its benefactions covered with the kisses of the poor. No breath of slander might tarnish the honour of his name in business or at home ; yet all the while the flames of sinful desires might be smouldering,

concealed, but not quenched ; hidden, not subdued.

'A man may smile, and smile, and be a villain.'

God's measure of man is not from without, but from within. As the heart is, so is the man. It is into the secret mind of man's being that God makes scrutiny. 'Out of the heart proceed the evil thoughts, murders, adulteries ;' and thence springs the defilement of man. The gleam of noble actions, generosity, and heroism, may for a moment gild the current of a life while its native hues are dark, cold, and polluted. It is the direction of the great heart-tide within which must be regarded. Splendid deeds are the ornaments of a life, but they cannot be taken as substitutes for its general tone and tenor. They may illuminate the surface for an instant, but the tide moves on unchanged.

'As a beam o'er the face of the waters may flow,
While the tide runs in darkness and coldness below ;
So the cheek may be tinged with a warm sunny smile,
Though the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while.'

For the disease of sin is one which has penetrated every part of man's being. Its presence may be traced in flagrant violations of morality, but no less may the law be transgressed by a wandering wish, and uncurbed lust. Yet even here we have not fathomed its full depths. When it is regarded as the transgression of law, whether in action or in heart, the notion of holiness is chiefly suggested as one of abstention from doing wrong. The sinner steps over the forbidden boundary. The good man keeps on the right side of the command. It is easy to see that the notion of sin thus obtained is deficient. We have there-

fore another aspect in which to regard it.

III. Sin is something more than the breach of a command ; it is sin when we fail to live up to it. To omit the good is to do evil. It is so, because purity, holiness, righteousness, cannot be regarded as merely negative. It is not the case that we have fulfilled the behest of God when we have duly observed in life and heart those precepts which run, 'Thou shalt not.' The commandments of God are given to urge us forward in benevolence, in zeal, in exertion for good, as well as to restrain us from evil. 'Thou shalt' is found among them as well as 'Thou shalt not.' To be holy means more than abstaining from pollution. We are called not only to cease to do evil, but to learn to do well. This will be apparent to any one who considers how impossible it is for man to remain neutral, exerting no influence. Even the inert mass of rock which has been

torn from the rugged mountain side
presses with weight upon the earth on
which it has fallen. If it is not adorning
the sides of the hills, it must be oppressing
the face of the ground. Only in the
regions of the dead can even the imagi-
nation of the poet picture a people who
walk with weightless feet.

‘Siete voi accorti
Che quel di retro muove ciò che tocca ?
Così non soglion fare i piè de’ morti.’

Inf. xii.

We cannot simply withdraw from evil ways : the heart emptied of one sin is soon filled with another. True holiness is active ; and to the indifferent, indolent, supine, negatively good is to be positively wrong.

Christ's own teaching furnishes us illustrations of this. The servant who hid his talent in the ground was not a bad man, I imagine. He was one who thought he would do nothing, that there *was no use* trying ; and he did nothing.

The curse of Meroz fell on him. He came not to the help of his Lord. He entered on no scheme for extending the borders of his master's dominion, or increasing the treasures of his master's house ; and he is greeted not only as slothful, but as wicked. 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou oughtest to have put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have received mine own with usury.' Similarly, the faults which our Lord points at in the parable of the good Samaritan, are those of omitting to do good. The Priest and Levite are not depicted as bad men. No crime is alleged against them : they may fairly be regarded as average specimens of their kind — moral, upright, religious men ; but possessed with the most degraded notions of God's demands on man's life, and supposing that they could evade the responsibility of active benevolence. But there is another picture more splendid than

these life - stories, which has been sketched by our Saviour's hand. He has drawn back the curtain for a moment, and pointed us to the scene which is yet to be enacted. The Saviour has returned. The thorns which once crowned His brow have given place to the diadem of regal sway. He sits, majestic and awful, upon the throne of judgment ; and before His bar are gathered the multitudes of earth's former occupants. In the assignment of their everlasting portions to those untold myriads, there is no mention of violence, fraud, murder, or open acts of wrong-doing. It is not evil done which condemns, but good left undone. 'I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat ; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink ; naked, and ye clothed me not ; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.' 'Ye did it *not*,' this was the ruin of these men ; and this will be the ruin, we fear, of thousands. Christian principles have made

way in the world ; they have overturned tyrannies ; they have exploded superstitions ; they have cemented societies ; they have elevated the morals, and refined the habits, of mankind ; but it is comparatively few of those thus influenced who fully understand how much further the requirements of these Christian principles extend, or realize that a life of colourless conventionalism is not a Christian life—that morality is not religion, that religiousness is not religion—that not to respond to the cry of the needy, nay, not to be up and doing, not to be on the alert for benevolence, is *sin*—that the broad commands of Christ—to succour the unfortunate, to open heart and hand to the suffering, to veil a brother's fault, to cheer the sorrowing, to preach the gospel in all the world—lay upon us real obligations, to neglect which is sin—sin in the eyes of our divine Christ, so dark and so heinous as to warrant that sentence of exclusion—‘Depart, ye cursed.’ Oh! well may we

look to our goings ; well may we, in our confession, add to our acknowledgments of the wrong that we have done, ‘ We have left undone those things which we ought to have done.’

We have touched on these forms of sin ; we have viewed this disease of our race, as the open act, the inner thought, and the omitted good. Before we pass away from this subject—there is another aspect of this terrible malady which it is well to consider, that we may more fully estimate the strength of this infection of our nature. I propose to look at sin as it is in itself, that we may understand what constitutes sin. All our considerations hitherto have pointed to what after all are but symptoms of the disorder, and not the disorder itself. Violence in action, irregularity of thought, indolence of disposition, these are but different manifestations of the disease which afflicts man. Just as the aching head, the burning skin, the wild, wandering words, the tortured limbs, the fainting

feeling, are symptoms of the fever. But if we would really know what it is which produces all these symptoms, we must turn our attention to the nature of man, and ascertain what hidden cause has thus deranged his system, and threatens his life.

Through all the commandments which God has given to men, there runs the same principle. Each statute is in harmony with the others and with all. There is a spirit which is common to all the commandments of the Decalogue, and of which they are the expression. Though these ten precepts were given at Sinai, they were only the formal embodiment of principles which existed before. The Magna Charta is called the charter of our liberties; but its value is really this, that it expresses the great principles of national freedom which had long been felt. The signature at Runnymede never would have been given had not the sentiments and aspirations of freedom beat in the hearts of the Barons.

and led them to brave the tyrant king. A parallel thought seems to be in St. Paul's mind (Rom. v. 13). He wishes to account for that long period prior to the giving of the law. There was sin in the world before the law. Death, one of the sad signs of the presence of sin, reigned during the length of the centuries which elapsed between Adam and Moses. Sin was rampant; and death dominant; but how sin, when there was no law? There was law, even when there were no laws; as there were conscious aspirations after freedom before the charter was given. Laws are only the application to particular cases of the principle of law. The principle of law had been violated in Adam. It was not a single offence: it was an upsetting of the order of his being. It was not simply an act of disobedience: it was a derangement of the whole system of his creation; it was not one deed alone: it was the stepping into an alien sphere of spiritual and *moral existence*. Every act of sin is a

symptom that in some degree or another man is alienated. The doing wrong is little, compared with the awful significance of every act of sin : it is only a bubble on the surface, but it tells whither the tide is tending. Sin in its fullest sense is a state much more than an action.

This is the reason why St. James argues that a man who is guilty in one point is guilty in all. Measure the sentiment by single acts, and it is a palpable absurdity. The murderer is not necessarily a liar, nor the liar a defrauder, nor the defrauder an adulterer. The man who steals cannot fairly be charged with having broken more than the eighth commandment. But when once we perceive that the theft is a symptom of a mind unsubordinated to the divine rule, we can understand that the man has betrayed a moral condition which is in violation of the order of his being ; and thus he is guilty of all. An illustration will make this clearer. The

great system of which our world is a single orb, is bound together by one law of gravity. Each individual planet has its separate orbit, and there is a variety in the form of the law which rules it ; but the power which governs Jupiter at the far verge of the system is the same which holds Mercury within the coronal of the sun. Let a planet leave its path. Viewed in one sense it has but transgressed the bounds of its orbit; but viewed in its actual effects, it has sinned against the whole order of its being, against the one principle which held all those shining worlds and satellites together : the wandering of that one planet is the derangement of the whole system. Not less exquisitely are the virtues and moral endowments of man united together by a sovereign principle of love; and the single transgression is a breach of that principle, and the entanglement of the varied-hued threads, which when harmonised constitute the fair pattern of perfect manhood. The remembrance of

this explains Christ's dealing with the young man who came to Him so full of earnestness and the desire of eternal life. Measured by single actions there was little to convict the young man of sin. He was not immoral, he was not unkind, he was not dishonest ; but the state of his being was wrong. A single requirement showed it. Christ laid His finger on one spot, and the young man recoiled in agony from the touch. It showed the state of his heart ; the disease was upon him. His heart was earthwards ; he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

It is this view which many miss ; and missing deceive themselves. To argue—I am good-tempered, I am amiable, I am just, I am moral, I am industrious—is beside the question. It does not touch God's indictment against us. It is as though a trespasser in his neighbour's field, or the poacher on his landlord's estate, should urge his sobriety in extenuation of his faults. It is as though

the extortioner or thief should object to the sentence on the ground that his domestic affections were strong, and his habits industrious. The indictment against us urged by conscience is that we are wanderers from God, that our hearts are habitually worldly, and our affections turned away from Him. To urge our kindness to one another does not restore our hearts to God. The accusation is not that we are deficient in amount, but in kind. We offer the correct number of coins to defray a debt, but if they are found to be made of a bad quality of metal, we are still debtors ; and the Almighty asks of us, not simply the copper kindnesses of mutual duties, but payment in the true gold of a heart animated by love to Him.

' O merchantman, at heaven's gate for heavenly ware,
Love is the only coin which passes current there.'

CHAPTER III.

THE MALIGNITY OF THE DISEASE.

IN the last chapter I endeavoured to sketch the nature of sin. It is needful that we should clearly understand something of the character of the enemy we have to contend with. The symptoms of the disease are only valuable as they lead us to its source. The languid eye, the sluggish pulse, the ashy cheeks, are hints which point at a hidden evil. The deeds of violence, adroit frauds, wandering lusts, sinister motives are signs of a disordered spiritual condition. The evil of sin lies much deeper than the act, or even than the wish which transgresses the law ; it is to be found in a nature dislocated from its proper position. It is to be found in

man revolted from the order of his being, and a stranger to its vital power —love to His God.

But it is one thing to trace back the disease to its source ; it is another to appreciate its malignity. We may have followed the medical explanation with diligent attention ; we may intelligently apprehend the root cause of the disorder ; but we may not fully recognize its devastating power. Knowledge of its source will not kindle apprehension of its evil effect. Terror, energy, untiring efforts to mitigate, arrest, or remove the spreading plague, these are not called forth in the lecturer's room, but in the houses where writhing victims of the fell sickness wrestle with pain and death. Neither shall we have a fair insight into the evil of sin because we have analysed its nature. To estimate its dread power, to understand that it is a real evil, we must survey it in its desolating consequences.

I. The narrow view of things which we are prone to take has the effect of disabling us from understanding all the evil. For so long as we bound our thoughts by the horizon of this world, we must fail to perceive the full meaning of sin, or rightly perceive the disastrous tendency of its presence. It is beyond all question that the more our minds dwell upon this earth, and exclude the thought of the vaster spiritual world, which is the higher domain to which man's nature has entrance, the less will be our abhorrence of the evil of sin. One of the most painful experiences of life is to meet with a true man of the world, who sees no evil, save in what shocks the foundation of society, and who measures sin not by moral pollution, but by political results. This lowered moral sense is the result of a view narrowed to this earth by the amputation of the spiritual world. A wider view would lead to a sterner repugnance to sin, as a thing charged

with destructive force. The higher the ascent we can climb, the more clearly shall we see which is the right way to choose. From the vantage-ground of the loftier eminence many a path which promised fair is perceived to lead to dangerous declivities and profitless wastes. The waters which appeared to glimmer refreshingly in front are found to be illusions, the corn-fields are discovered to be mere prodigality of gorse, and the beaten track to lose itself in dreary marshland. The circumscribed view is ever deceptive.

It is felt to be so in social or political questions. When the individual interests of a great commercial city are considered alone, a certain course of legislation may appear not only harmless but unmixedly good ; but the statesman, who takes a wider view, remembers that the larger interests of the whole nation must govern legislation, and not the isolated good of a single town. What may advance the

interests of Liverpool or Bristol may prove fatal to the welfare of England. What the corporation of a great city deems desirable may not be consistent with the wider good of the people at large. The fussy little functionary, whose mind is pre-occupied with local prejudices, cannot for the life of him see any injury, where the true politician sees inevitably disastrous effects.

A further illustration is found in the efforts at systematic and well-regulated beneficence among ourselves. To relieve the necessities of the impoverished who ask our alms is a good thing. Judged at first sight, and merely by the merits of the single case, no objection can be raised; but a wider view reveals to us a state of things which calls that first judgment in question. This single case of distress is the symptom of widespread pauperism. To relieve it at hap-hazard is to run the risk of pampering professional pauperism to the neglect of the

uncomplaining needy. It is to repress a symptom at the risk of extending the disease. Contemplated with the eye of an enlarged benevolence, spasmodic and impulsive generosity is little short of criminal folly. The wider view shows that to be evil in which the limited view could find no wrong. We can only then, truthfully say, 'This is good and right, and there is no harm in this course,' when we have surveyed the course proposed in the light of the broadest interests involved. The gain of the individual may be the misery of the city. The aggrandizement of the city may be the impoverishment of the state. The wealth of the state may be the enfeebling of the world. The broader our sympathies and the more catholic our thoughts, the more keen shall we be to detect the evil tendencies of selfish, small, and narrow thoughts; and may there not lurk among human actions evils which men—even the best—are

unconscious of? The broadest thought can barely grasp the love of kind, and make it the governing principle of his life. The best and wisest is bounded in his view by our world's horizon. Its good—what will advance its well-being—these are the limits of natural benevolence. But once let in the thought of other worlds—once let us remember that our earth is but one fair part of an extended dominion, the interests of which are various, multiform, and intricate—and then we shall see how it may be that many things in which man can see no wrong are yet fraught with the seeds of desolating energy. To say, 'I can see no wrong in this,' will not make the act harmless. Wiser men see harm where you see none. To say, 'This can do no harm, because it tends to the good of mankind,' can only be safely said when we have estimated by a view ranging far beyond the bounds of world or time what is truly for the good of

mankind. Certain courses of action may advance men's material interests, but disastrous results may flow from them, notwithstanding the temporary increase of worldly gain; for the line of some higher law may be transgressed, and the first in a chain of causes set in motion, to work in the end untold misery and incalculable ills. Truly and fully to estimate the malignant effects of this great pestilence of sin our stand must not be taken in this world alone. Only when we climb to the steps of God's throne can we fairly perceive the giant miseries it works; only there can we fully understand what is sin, and what is not. In His light alone can we see the light and the dark.

II. But even limiting our view to this world—the disastrous evils of sin are apparent.

Mere doctrinaires seldom succeed in the world. History has afforded us several examples of men who have

emerged from the elaboration of some theory to apply it in experiment to the world, but only to be thwarted and disappointed. The successful statesman is seldom, if ever, a theorist. Things as they ought to be are the materials of theories ; things as they are form the materials of practical statesmen. The beneficent projects of the theorist are disturbed by the obstinacy, the self-indulgence, the avarice, the stupidity of men. The presence of sin in some form or another is too strong for the ideal commonwealth. The man who has spent his life in the midst of men, who has watched their characters, who has fathomed their motives, and gauged their powers, finds it hard enough to guide the government of a great country ; for selfishness in its myriad forms is fertile in expedients to derange the social framework to her own advantage. The very best and most stable communities cannot dispense with a constabulary force to control lawless-

ness and repress crime. Houses of correction, houses of detention, gaols, police courts, magistrates—what are these but so many proofs that there is a certain widespread evil which threatens more or less the well-being of the land? Symptoms of derangement are present wherever sin is found; just as incoherent replies, wandering attention, unaccountable irritability, misuse of language, are observable results of a disordered brain.

It is said that the presence of the tiniest speck of dirt is enough to ruin the success of a chemical experiment. The elements which should remain stationary or quietly coalesce are thrown into disturbance, or an unlooked-for and vexatious crystallisation takes place, which puts an end to the experiment. The ordinary observer would be puzzled—the keenest eye could detect no cause—but the chemist would know that the vessel made use of could not have been perfectly, chemically clean. Not less

fatal to the peace and order of our race, and to the quietness of our own spirits, is the presence of sin. The slightest breach of those principles which the Almighty has revealed as rooted in His universe must sooner or later be followed by disturbance. Who has not noted it in nations? who has not seen it in families? Loose morality in courts and lawless theories in philosophy have saturated the public mind, and evoked the spirit of confusion and bloodshed. Many a quiet little home has been first disturbed, then divided, and finally utterly broken up, by the introduction of gaily veiled vice. Many a noble mind has been unhinged, its power of usefulness destroyed, and its most splendid prospects blighted, by one false step, or by the embrace of one alluring sin. It is impossible to close our eyes to the evidences of the evil of sin. Its indulgence evermore spreads misery, disorder, despair. Like the plague it moves from

house to house, and from city to city, carrying death in its wake. Like a neglected wound, it festers, and diffuses mortification through sound limb and over healthy flesh, and threatens the very citadel of life itself.

The experience of life and the solemn way in which the disastrous results of sin are forced on our attention, start the inquiry, if sin, then, diffuses evil, who will undertake to say that its pernicious influences end with this life? Who will not pause in the presence of a power so terribly and resistlessly destructive? Has not the Almighty implanted these awful consequences of sin on all sides of us that we may learn from its effects the real character of sin?

CHAPTER IV.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE DISEASE.

THE higher men have climbed in the way of holiness, the deeper has been their conviction of the evil of sin.

It is one of the features of religious life that as men grow in holiness they grow in humility. Men of the world, or men who have never probed the depths of their own hearts, are amazed to listen to the language of Christian men. They cannot understand how those who are notable for holy, self-denying, serene lives should be so deeply distressed because of sin. It is sometimes called morbidness of temperament ; it is sometimes scouted as hypocrisy. It is no doubt true such causes

are not unfrequently at the root of elaborate confessions of sinfulness ; but they are not sufficient to account for the fact that many Christ-loving men—whom it would be absurd to charge with a morbid tendency, and monstrous to accuse of hypocrisy—have been thus keenly conscious of sin. We read the story of heroic labours for Christ and for men ; we note the quiet love, the gentleness under rebuke, the guilelessness in the midst of a guileful world ; we follow the progress of a faith which seemed undisturbed in the thick of difficulty, doubt, and danger ; we watch the ripening holiness of the life till we feel refreshed, as though we breathed a purer, freer atmosphere ; but when we draw near to hearken to the heart-words of such holy men of old, we can scarcely credit our hearing : we are amazed to hear confessions of sin, and the laments over shortcomings, and failings, and neglects. Is this the man whose blame-

less life we have admired even to reverence? How is it he thus bewails his faults?

Listen to the wise and self-forgetful Ezra : 'I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, O my God.' Hear the high-souled and holy Isaiah : 'Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips.' And there is another—there is one who has devoted his life to the cause of God among men. He has passed through perils and endured persecutions ; the breath of malicious slander and envious enmity cannot dim the lustre of his service, or taint the holy purity of his life ; the voice of the Church of Christ breaks forth in his praise. But what does he say of himself? 'I am the chief of sinners.' This is not Saul, who persecuted the Church—this is not the violent and ruthless oppressor of innocent women and children—this is the language of the apostle who was gentle, like a mother-nurse over the infant

churches—unwearied in his patience, unmurmuring in his sufferings, and unswerving in his fidelity to his Master.

The testimony of later Christian life is the same. Men of God, like Zinzen-dorf, Tauler, Knox, Wesley, and Row-land Hill, have given utterance to the same thought. ‘I can see,’ said the dying John Wesley, ‘nothing that I have done or suffered that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this,—

“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”

It is not hard to understand why this sense of sin should deepen with ripening holiness. In its very nature, the increase of holiness is the quicken-ing of our sensibility of sin. The edu-cated eye will detect blemishes in the picture which the common herd applaud as perfect. It is one of the penalties of superior knowledge, that with increased

powers comes increasing capacity for pain.

‘Quanto la cosa è più perfetta,
Più senta ’l bene, e così la doglienza.’

Inf. vi. 107-8.

‘The nearer each attain.
A perfect state, a finer sense is given
To thrill with pleasure or to throb with pain.’

Wright's Translation.

He who has soared to look at the lights of heaven will count the brightest of earth's glories as but a feeble and wavering glimmer. The candle that illumines our houses burns black when held up against the sun. The soul that lives nearest to God is most conscious of his sin.

‘They who fain would serve thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.’

There is good in this. To the saint it is education, discipline—the enlarging of his moral and spiritual grasp—the developing of his capacity for holiness. To the world, the testimony of

his blameless life, and the acknowledgement of his many faults, serve to heighten the sense of the evil of sin. Is it not thus that the world is convinced of sin? Not simply is it that the blameless lives of God's children witness against the dark defects of earth-loving men, but the saint sorrowing for spots on his radiant robe tends to waken hearts that have slumbered on, scarcely realising the deep and subtle power of sin.

There is yet another way in which we may estimate the evil of sin. We have not all climbed to that height of blamelessness of life whence we can look down and measure to its deeps the full and far-reaching strength of the evil. Its devastating consequences, indeed, are frightfully manifest to us. Our life moves ever onward through a country which unfolds to us the terrible blight which sin leaves behind. The blossoms which brighten along our pathway blow into poisonous

weeds ; the worm in the bud withers and wounds our fairest hopes ; but these come so frequently across our experience, that, like men in battle, we learn scarcely to heed the falling and the wounded. But could I bring to you a flower fairer than all the rest — one which would waken your attention by the brightness of its heavenly hues, and charm you with its comeliness and sweetness — this might arrest your interest and hope as you watched it grow ; this might stir your sorrow as you saw it die. Here is such a flower. The dews of immortality are yet upon it, the colours of its celestial birth still brighten on its leaves, the fragrance of Paradise breathes from its heart ; but, see ! in this murky atmosphere of sin, it droops and falls — to be spurned, and crushed, and forsaken on the dusty highways of life. What terrible death must be weighting an air which kills the amaranthine bloom !

What hot fever-breath of sin to parch
the glistening drops of immortality!

Christ Jesus—the fairest rose of life! the one unstained flower of humanity, growing like a stainless lily among the weeds and thorns of human kind, a well-statured plant in an unkindly soil—dies, a victim of that terrible plague of our race: sin slew Him, who died for sin. You can estimate the evil of sin by no more terrible test. You will not measure its full strength in the hunger-stricken and diseased, whom the hereditary taint of sin has consigned to lives of misery—in the millions whom worthless ambition has devoted to the sword—in the uneasiness of society, the scourge of household peace, the laments of great saints. These but test the strength of the stream partially and accidentally. Only by the tears of the Saviour can we understand its essential force—only where the guileless, loving, and sinless Jesus dies, can we learn the

rooted ills of sin. Terrible, indeed, was that plague which called for such a healing—awful that evil which sacrificed such a life.

This evil is ours. The Bible speaks of sinners as well as of sin ; and a sinner in the Bible sense is not simply one who has sinned, but one who is sinful. This is worse, for it implies a kind of possession of sin. To have sinned is bad : the thought of what we have done haunts us at times —disturbs our rest, and disquiets us in our work. To be sinful is even worse. It is to carry about with us the power and disposition of sin. It is the feeling of one who knows that the plague is in him, and he cannot get rid of it. The sin plague has woven its web around our hearts, and spreads its meshes throughout the whole framework of our being. It is inrooted. Other evils you may get rid of, but not this. Poverty you may, by diligence, thrift, and un-

pausing self-denial, drive from your doors. Care and fit remedies may alleviate, and even dispel, pain. Time, it is said, will wear off the keen edge of the sharpest sorrow. Change and rest, and the kindness of womanhood, will nurse away sickness. Renewed courage and effort will repair failure, and even error. But sin neither diligence, nor suffering, nor courage, nor time, can dislodge. It belongs to you ; it is part of that subtle moral nature which defies analysis and survives the decay of the body. The last evils of life—its neglect, its unkindness, its procrastinated recognition of worth, its inconsistencies, its disappointments—these die with us in the grave ; but the moral nature carries with it the taint and the presence of sin when the body has mingled in dust. It is your inseparable companion now ; it is your own. You may forget it awhile amid business cares or bustling pleasures, but, like a dull, chill, and un-

earthly comrade, it waits for you. It joins you as you leave your friends ; with noiseless footfall it walks beside you as you pace the streets ; it is beside you as you rest at home ; it pillows itself beside you at night—your sinful self—the second self you cannot shake off, and which designs to pass with you into the unseen world, and stand beside you at the Father's gate. You would blush to be met by your good Father in such unmannerly company. You must ask help to abandon it now. Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In the light of the cross that dark shadow which dogs your footsteps will melt away. You will be made meet to enter the open doors of our Father's house.

CHAPTER V.

SIN AS A DISEASE.

FOR centuries the Christian Church was delighted to point out how aptly sickness illustrates sin. In its malignity in the dread of infection, in its universality, in the miseries which follow in its wake, in its symptoms, many instructive parallels have been drawn. The leprosy is one striking example. All the strange characteristics of this awful scourge, all the precautions and requirements of the Jewish law have been used as illustrations of the features and strength of sin. But it is not in one disorder only that the points of instruction have been sought and found. The very varieties of disease

have supplied images of the different aspects of sin.

Our object is to track deeper. ‘Sin,’ said a profound thinker, ‘is evil having an origin.’ Our duty is to trace that origin. It is not merely to inquire how that one patient is ill—what is this disorder, and how does it differ from that? But what is the common root whence this and that sickness alike spring? We have partly traced this in inquiring into the nature of sin; but there remains a wide field for further thought.

Medical men in all ages have sought similar knowledge with regard to disease. What is the one thing wherein disease consists? I see that man is fearfully and wonderfully made: his frame consists of a fabric marvellously built up of various elements blended together in the most wondrous proportion. The presence of one single element in excess is enough to derange the whole frame. Is disease always to

be accounted for by saying that it arises from the undue proportion of some one element? If so, disease is to be got rid of by reducing that one to its proper quantity. Or, it has been said, the very atmosphere around us is charged with pestilential atoms hostile to the life of man. The admission of one poisonous particle into the frame is sufficient to account for any disorder. The pestilence walketh in darkness. Unseen, veiled in the transparent atmosphere we breathe, lurk the forces which are deadly and dangerous. Is all disease to be accounted for by the presence of some poisonous element in the system? If so, the remedy lies in expelling the enemy. The method of cure is governed by the theory of disease which the physician adopts. If he believes it to consist in the presence in excess of some lawful element, he will attempt cure by elimination. If he believes in the view which represents disease to

result from the presence of some hostile element, he will seek to neutralise, or more probably to expel it.

In both these lights sin has been regarded. Sin is the excess of good ; vice but the exaggeration of virtue. There is a truth in this, but the remedy has not been fully successful. The cure has been attempted by the endeavour to restore the balance : let prudence control benevolence ; let discretion temper zeal ; but practically a painful monotony has been the result : the man has been developed as a model of moderation, but on investigation he is little better than a mass of negations. He is not a fanatic, for he believes in sober judgment; he is not a sceptic, for he believes in religion ; he is not uncharitable, for he believes in the grace of giving ; he is not extravagant, for he believes in prudence. But when you take the positive side, and ask what he is, you are at a loss how to describe

him ; for aspirations after higher things — intense longings after holiness, labours abundant and incessant—there are none of these.

But sin has been viewed as the presence of a positively poisonous element. It must be got rid of ; the evil must be expelled. With pain and difficulty the task has been attempted, but with what result ? The patient has collapsed beneath the violence of the remedy. The cure has effected more quickly that which the disease would in time have accomplished. Or suppose it successful ; suppose that the patient has been strong, and has survived the means used, the result is only negative at the best. The evil spirit is gone, but the house is empty, and the evil spirits hover round the door. The patient is cured, but he lies in a state of prostration, and he is liable to receive new infection at every pore from every breath.

It would seem, then, that it is not

enough to reduce exaggeration or to expel evil. The cure by elimination is not sufficient. Disease is not wholly accounted for by representing it as something more than nature. This seems the point from which modern medical science appears to be starting. A change is slowly passing over the profession. Nature needs more than to be relieved of the burden or the poison ; she needs to be upheld. Names of new medicines are heard of. The public does not inquire what these mean, but nearly all are indicative of a change of opinion concerning the theory of disease. 'If you look down the lists of new articles of *materia medica* brought into common use of late,' writes Dr. Chambers, 'you will see none that are of a nature to augment destructive metamorphoses. Cod-liver oil, hypophosphite of lime, phosphate of iron, manganese, soda and potass, ox-gall, pepsine, pancreatine, are familiar instances of those whose intention is to

form a new basis of cell-growth, thus being directly constructive. The surgeon, too, where the skin is lost or wounded, builds up as good a restoration or imitation as he can, with collodion, or some other impermeable substance, to shield the inside tissues, instead of leaving them open to the bitter air, as in the horrible operation of dressing and cleansing.'

Or, in other words, where the practitioner of olden days devoted his whole energy to dislodging the disease, the practitioner of to-day thinks more of restoring the patient. He has, perhaps, a wider trust in the power of nature, and sets himself to strengthen her, that she may rally and cast off the plague. Disease is being regarded more and more as a deficiency of vital power—as something less, not something more, than nature. 'Daily,' continues the same writer, 'stronger and stronger an impression is being borne in upon the

practitioner's mind that disease is something less, not something more, than life' . . . 'When we are sick,

'Tis life of which our limbs are scant,
'Tis life, more life, for which we pant,
'Tis life, and fuller life, we want'

A parallel representation of the nature of sin may be found in Scripture. The word which is most commonly used for *sin* is one which holds the germ of this very thought.

There are various words expressive of sin. It is transgression, where the emblem is that of a boundary-line having been wrongfully crossed. It is iniquity, where an unevenness of dealing is hinted. It is pollution, where the idea of stain upon what was once pure and clean is implied. But the commonest word is *áuparia*, which indicates a missing of the mark—a defect from what should be—a something less than the life divine. It is similarly said that we have *come short* of the glory of God—that our

sinful state is one deficient of full divine strength—‘when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.’ And in harmony with this, our Saviour used expressions which implied defect. ‘One thing thou lackest,’ ‘One thing is needful.’

It is worth observing, too, that the very number which is employed in Scripture to express man’s nature and power, apart from divine help, is just one short of the number which represents perfection. Six is the number of a man; seven is the number of perfection.

The theory of the disease in this case governs the method of cure. If the disease is a defect of vital power, the remedy must be its restoration. If the disease be a want of life, the cure must be life bestowed and supplied in abundance.

The Bible expressions bear out the thought. Christ gives ‘life unto the world.’ He is come, that men may

have life, and have it more abundantly.' 'He that hath the Son hath life.' 'Christ is our life,' wrote the apostle, echoing the very words of Christ, who said, 'I am the life.' He is the second Adam, and as such He is a quickening spirit. From Him flows that fresh energy, the quickening pulses of the new life. Whoever is in Him is a new creation.

The imagery of Scripture conveys the same notion. Turn to the parables. The Christian is the branch deriving sap and vital nourishment from Jesus, who is the tree. The fruit and blossom on the branch prove that a healthy circulation of the juice is going forward between trunk and shoot.

Perhaps even more striking is the language which the Evangelists, especially St. Luke—the physician, be it remembered—uses concerning the miracles of Jesus. It seems to be implied that the healing was effected by the transmission from the Christ of some vital

power, which invigorated the bodily system, and enabled it to cast off the disease. ‘There went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.’ ‘I perceive,’ said Jesus, ‘that virtue is gone out of me.’ St. Luke almost suggests the application of the same notion to the disorders of the spirit, when he describes the presence of the pharisees and doctors of the law at Capernaum, and adds, ‘The power of the Lord was present to heal them.’

This healing which the Christ vouchsafed to the bodies of men—that healing which He gives to the souls of men, is healing by restoration. The law might be described as an attempt at healing by ‘opposition.’ It met every evil tendency of our nature with a distinct negative, ‘Thou shalt not.’ Christ, on the contrary, takes the sinner by the hand, and tells him that all his sickness is the result of one great want, the lack of life of God in the spirit. He does not chide him

by telling him how far he is fallen, or how many times he has done wrong. He simply tells him that what he needs is restorative medicine, which will reform the basis of life anew. And thus all the emblems by which Christ reveals Himself to the soul of man are those which suggest the idea of new power. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Vine whence flows wine. He supplies the milk and the meat, and all that will build up the divine life, till the evil is starved out of it. This receives a double illustration from that ever-open book of God—nature around us. Sin has been taken as imaged by disease. Perhaps most significantly of all, because of its infectious power. But it is not evil alone that spreads. The pestilence which creeps from house to house, or the fever that leaps from breath to breath, has parallel in the growth of good, and the infectiousness of health.

—the bright and the sweet grow in their place.

Such is Christ in the world and in the heart. In the world there have been diffused the higher teachings of truths leading mankind by insensible stages to a mellower, gentler, and more humane life—elevating the tastes, raising the morals, refining the enjoyments. In the heart the power of Christ dwelling there by faith works the same change. We are not left alone to fight against sin. He is with us, and in us. In Him, who promised to be at our side, even to the end of the world, we find Healer as well as Redeemer—the Saviour from sin as well as from guilt. It is not in vain contest that we encounter temptations. We are not alone in the combat. He is on our right hand; we shall not greatly fall. Still the festering sores of sin may trouble us, but we may give up the morbid habit of incessantly looking at

them. We may in quietness and confidence follow the great Physician's rules, and commit the result to Him. We may each day draw closer to Him in whom is power for every ailment, strength against every temptation, and from whom there goes forth evermore virtue to heal us all.

out pause, and I work.' The *same* works which the Father doeth, doeth the Son likewise. There is no divergence of end or teaching. Their language is one—the language of the heaven, which is love. The voice of Nature and Providence may sound more terrible in our ears; but they speak the one speech of heaven; they will not dread to hear them, but rather rejoice to catch the harmonies of their blended tongues, who have learned to understand the language of celestial love on the lips of Him who spake as man, and yet as never man spake. That still small voice of the human Christ was as the hushed voice of the great Father speaking to His children. Christ was the Mediator unfolding in word and work, in miniature, as has been well said by a suggestive writer, 'the meaning of the great world's voice both far and near.'

When, then, we take up the record of *His life on earth*, or turn over the pages

Iis life-giving word, we expect that will speak to us. His parables are key to explain Nature's voice ; His acles explain Providence ; while both ask of grace and the Spirit-life within. id all the widespread miseries of man- l it is a happy thing to be able to r His voice, and note in His works unfolding of His rich and higher pur- es. Accidents, misfortunes, cata- phe,- those untoward calamities ch we call inscrutable providences : e have gained a fresh meaning since ist revealed to us 'the Father in even.' He did not explain all. We but children, and we cannot under- id all yet till we come to the mea- : of the stature of the fulness of ist, and till we know as we are own. But He gave us hints, illus- ions, warnings. Above all, He wed us that He was ruling over all could curb all; and that He was . The winds fell, and billows were

reined in by His word ; He wept, and mingled sympathisingly amid all human sorrow. Had He done nothing more, we should have learned something great and grand for suffering human nature to know and to beat in upon the weary brain when most stricken and bewildered with sorrow, as an all-solacing thought, ‘ He rules over all and He is love.’

Disease is, I think, the most conspicuous of human evils, accidents and catastrophes may be more startling for the time ; but disease is more settled, more general, and more persistent. It is widespread, it is to be seen attacking every branch and race of the human family, and that with an almost malignant power of variation. The northerner congratulates himself that his home is not set beneath the soft summer skies which veil the fatal malaria, but he falls a victim to the wasting consumption. *The hardy mountaineer rejoices that the*

shivering ague which assails the lowlander does not haunt his life, but he is assailed by the hideous bronchocele. The dweller in the Alpine valley may loathe the goitre of the highlander, but a terrible cretinism haunts his sight.

The malignity of disease is, perhaps, even more awful when we observe with what apparent cunning it watches the hours of man's weakness—developing its terrible and concealed energy out of some simple disorder, and exerting its intensest strength in the hours of feeble infancy, or reserving it for man's declining years. Like shadows which are longer at the sunrise and the sunset, the dark presence of disease is darkest and strongest in man's earliest and latest years. The little infant struggles into being and manhood through a maze of varying dangers and disorders. Defeated of their prey, the evils of sickness and disease seem to retire for a while; but it is only into ambush to wait the fitting moment.

when, like evening wolves, they may break forth upon the weakness of declining years—aided too often with the fatal alliance of distempers which man's neglect or folly has driven into confederacy against himself.

But if we add to these ordinary evils the remembrance of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the sickness that wasteth in noonday—if we bear in mind the millions that are swept away by epidemic, or fall victims to hunger, fever, or contagious complaints, our wonder must be at the comparative complacency of men placed amid enemies so strong, varied, and subtle. Certainly the accident, the storm, the fire, the earthquake, which destroy hundreds at a single stroke, arrest more immediate attention; but only because they are less usual calamities. Sickness sweeps away in one month more than accident (railway accidents included) in a whole year. Amid all the dark foes of human

life, disease is the sternest, the most injurious, the most relentless. Appropriately, then, the aspect in which Christ most conspicuously appears on the page of Gospel story is that of a healer. By far the greater number of His miracles are works of healing. When we read in a later book that our Lord went about doing good, the picture which is called up before our minds is of the strange varieties of human sickness and disease which were removed by His word or His touch. If the highest work of Christ is His death, the most constant acts of His ministry are those of giving life and healing.

This is all the more noteworthy as it is an aspect which some recent and superficial biographers of our Master have passed over in silence, or if they have noticed it at all, they have only done so to reject the facts and the teaching of the facts. But so conspicuous is the idea in the Gospel that we

feel that it must have some significance. We have only to enumerate the number of diseases and ailments which the Evangelists mention to see over what kind of maladies He exercised His divine sway. All manner of sickness and disease among the people. Those that had torments, the possessed, the lunatic, the palsy, the blind, the halt, the leper, the lame ; fever, epilepsy, dysentery, and dropsy ; deafness and dumbness. All these and more are mentioned in the sacred story with the sublime comment, grand in its simplicity—‘ He healed them all.’ This feature, which was so prominent in his daily life, He sets forth in His first sermon at Nazareth. The very text he chose on that occasion sounded the key-note of the after harmonies of His mission. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. Recovery of sight to the blind, binding up of the broken-hearted, comfort to the bruised, are the objects of His coming.

One, himself skilled in medicine, traces with a professional hand the symptoms of the various disorders which were brought to Christ. Luke, the beloved physician, has narrated in terms often technically explicit, the nature of sicknesses which Jesus of Nazareth healed. They were no unreal cures which were wrought by Christ. The medical skill which was afterwards so valuable to the great Apostle of the Gentiles, would not be deceived. In all the variety of cases which were brought under his notice, there was ample opportunity of detecting imposture or the use of ordinary remedies. The classes and the ages of the patients were diverse enough to afford abundant material for judgment. The old, the middle-aged, and the young, were alike subjects of the Saviour's healing power.

Real, abundant, and appropriate, were the blessings of healing which flowed from Christ. As sickness dominated the

world, it is as the saviour of mankind from that scourge that Jesus appears. He exerts His power to roll back that tide of woe from the race : He proves Himself equal to the task. He emancipates youth and relieves age from its hated dominion—the demoniac boy and the old man wearied with his thirty-eight years of palsy, Peter's mother-in-law, and the little daughter of Jairus. But we may gain yet a higher sense of the healing power of Christ by simply examining one passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew. We read in Matt. iv. 23, 24, ‘That our Lord healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people . . . They brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy ; and He healed them.’

The evangelist enumerates a large number of disorders. We are disposed

to pass it by, and regard as a half-rhetorical account the numberless cases of sickness healed by Christ ; but it is not the idea of number which is most prominent. Rather is it that of the variety of the classes of diseases brought to Him for cure. Disease is not another word for sickness in this passage ; but it is a word expressive of another class of ailment : and torments implies a third. The force of the distinction between the words ‘sickness’ and ‘disease’ is variously explained. By some, ‘sickness’ is that to mean ‘confirmed disease,’ and ‘disease’ (*μαλακία*) to mean ‘incipient complaints.’ Viewed thus, the passage reminds us that the power of Christ was sufficient both to arrest the developing disorder, and to remove it when firmly established in the system ; while the additional word, *torments*, which is generally allowed to mean disease attended with bodily pain, tells us that the Good Physician could mitigate the tor-

tures as well as rebuke the complaint. But the two former words may be differently understood. Diseases are divided by medical men into two great classes, viz., (1) those which display preternatural energy, such as fevers, in fact, all diseases of a phlogistic character, which they call *sthenic*, and (2) those which result from weakness and general debility, such as decline, consumption, and these they call *asthenic*. To these two classes the words *sickness* and *disease* may refer. The distinction is not too modern to allow of such reference, as the difference between those sicknesses which showed activity and those which were apathetic is very simple and obvious, and seems to have been in the mind of the Psalmist when he described his emotions on two different occasions. At one time he speaks of the torments of his enemies under the emblem of a feverish disorder, and so belonging to the *sthenic* class, 'My bones are burned as

an hearth.' (Ps. cii. 3.) At another time he pictures his lonely misery under the image of an asthenic disease—of one suffering from the extremest debility. 'I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint : my heart is like wax : it is melted in the midst of my bowels.' (Ps. xxii. 14.)

With this light on the verse, and remembering who it was that cried from the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' we may perceive a depth of significance in the words of Prophet and Evangelist : 'Himself took our infirmities and bare our sickness.' 'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.'

But there is yet another family of ills which the Evangelist speaks of. As those we have touched on related to the physical and muscular system, so the remaining three have more or less affinity with mental and nervous disorders. Not the sick, the diseased,

and the tormented, alone did Christ heal; but the paralytic, the lunatic, and the possessed. These appear to me to be gradations of cerebral complaints. I do not mean to deny the reality of demoniacal possession; I believe it to have been most real, but to have stood at the apex of a class of complaints more or less connected with one another. The palsy is more properly a paralysis, a disease which all medical men know to be related to the brain and spinal system. It is more frequently met with in those whose minds have been tried by cares and anxieties, or who have indulged in that class of vice which invariably acts upon the brain and nervous system. As a stage above, or below this, comes the case of lunacy. In the former case the brain retains its consciousness of power, but without much active strength. In this case the mind is victimized by hallucinations, and is degraded by the supposed or real

and undue influence of nature and things about it. In the last stage the man is under a terrible bondage—not outward nature, but darker influences possess a wondrous and inscrutable sway over him. The sanctuary of thought and will is invaded, and reigned over by the wicked one to the confusion of the victim's own individuality. Each of these three stages illustrates stages in the downward progress of one who by small degrees surrenders himself, *i.e.*, his sacred will and reason, to the influence of vice or evil. Each step is accompanied by an increasing degradation : the body is first touched, and the mental organization only weakened, reason impaired and will enfeebled, then the mind sinks under the influence of outward things ; the powers which man in his uprightness can control, now but enslave him ; till at last the evil spirits, to whose suggestions he has given an entrance, establish their hateful do-

minion within the shrine and citadel of man's individuality and independence. In seeking independence, he finds bondage ; in acknowledging his dependence in God, he finds his primæval freedom. 'He only rules nature who has learned to obey her,' is a dictum true in the spiritual as well as in the natural world. He only is master of himself who is servant of Christ : he only is set free from the vicious influences and evil tyrannies of sin and iniquity who has sought for virtue from the Healer of man. We have anticipated intentionally the moral significance of disease ; but we have done so that the practical force of Christ's healing power may be seen to touch ourselves ; and that we may contemplate Him as able to heal all manner of sickness and disease : the fever of pride, anger, and ambition ; the asthenic disorders of indolence, sloth, and cowardice, as well as to control the evil dispositions of self-will, doubt, and worldliness, and

that frenzied, Christ-hating spirit which is not yet extinct, but makes havoc among those whom vice, and heedlessness, and the harpies of society, have prepared for its influence,—He healeth them all.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FITNESS OF THE WORD TO THE
FORMS OF DISEASE.

EVERY age is distinguished by some peculiarities of language. Some special set of words comes into fashion, only to be set aside by a new set in the succeeding generation. Every advancing era adds to our stock of words by fresh importations, and adds also to the great lumber-room of worn-out and obsolete phrases ; and he who would pay a visit to that great lumber room and come forth arrayed in the faded apparel of a past generation, and garnish his speech with discarded words, would be received with pitying smiles by men, new-fangled with a somewhat tawdry array of novelties of speech.

The peculiar phrases of each age are drawn from, or at least influenced by, the direction of human energy. Whatever sphere it is in which men's powers are mostly displayed, from that sphere it is that the language of the day is culled.

In an age of warfare, when the genius and energies of man are enlisted in the conduct of campaigns, the manipulation of troops, the language of the day is insensibly drawn largely from the field of battle. In times when the minds of men are exercised in great problems of speculative thought, then the current and popular speech will be largely coloured with semi-philosophical expressions. In days of international conquests and treaties, when readjustments and national differences, and reconcilements of mutually conflicting interests are taking place, the language of diplomacy is heard in every mouth ; and a lawyer-like flourish will adorn ordinary conversation at times when the courts of justice are prominent.

A scientific age will talk scientifically, a warlike age will talk strategically, and a litigious age will appreciate a quibble.

When a peculiar set of words and thoughts are thus occupying the public mind, every new question will present itself to men in an aspect touched and coloured by the prevailing ways of thinking. In a warlike age even a new discovery will be described as a new force brought into the field, and as endangering the position of some former improvement; and in a diplomatic age, it will be discussed how far the introduction of a new patent will disturb existing relationships, or require the rectification of former limitations or restrictions. These variations in the language and modes of thought of different ages necessarily offer a very severe test to any system of teaching which is designed to be for all time. The form in which it first appeared was, no doubt, fitting and attractive to the age of its birth, but the lapse

of time has rendered its appearance old-fashioned, its language obsolete, and its claims unpopular. The more remote the era of its appearance the less likelihood of its being understood or valued by the bulk of mankind. It may be regarded as an object of curiosity and interest by the antiquarian or the historian ; but it can hardly expect to be received with welcome or adopted with affection by the masses of the population. The constant changes of language, the incessant alterations in the dominant ideas among men, are evidently hostile to the life of any system of instruction however ingeniously devised or patiently propagated.

It will be evident that this is precisely the danger which the teaching and the religion of the Bible have passed through. In upwards of eighteen centuries of change and revolution—through eras of political strife, philosophical debate, and theological animosity, the Christian re-

ligion has continued to live, and has ever extended her frontier. The changes, political, social, and geographical, which have proved fatal or injurious to other religious or philosophical systems, seem but to have strengthened her claims, and developed her energies. As age after age has rolled by, overwhelming with its storms, or swallowing up with convulsions, the speculative or social schemes of the greatest and best of men, the Christian religion has exhibited a marvellous power of adapting herself to her position as the teacher of human kind. Without betraying her trust, without causing a blot or blemish upon her fair fame, without pandering to the tastes, or coquetting with the follies of any age, she has through successive generations and centuries, by the marvellous comprehensiveness of her divinely constituted system, vindicated her claim to the confidence of all time. Amid hundreds of false and perverted forms of Christ-

ianity—amid the frailties and follies of the best of her sons—amid the subtle conspiracies and base treacheries of open enemies and false friends—true, genuine Christianity, when inquired of aright at her own lips, and not through the medium of some would-be infallible but disloyal interpreter, has answered to the call of every age, and in a language which all could understand. In the ample and varied phraseology of the Bible there has been found the thought and the form of thought which the peculiarities of each age required ; and the gospel has been expressed so as to reach the intelligence of eras distinguished by the greatest diversities of thought and language.

The Providence of God has shielded the life of this book among men, watched over its growth, and so built it up through the lapse of successive and varying periods, that it holds within itself not only one truth which is

needed for all time, but one truth set forth under a variety of aspects fitted to the shifting requirements of every era unchanged ; and the gospel in essence may be presented in forms readily comprehended by men influenced by almost endless differences of education or experience.

Thus to an age strongly saturated with diplomatic ideas, the gospel might appear as the covenant of peace which God had made with mankind, and which He ratified by the blood of the cross. In an age of war, the gospel would seem as the going forth of the love of God against the hostile powers of the wicked, and seeking to emancipate a bondaged world. In an age of a strenuous exploration of the realms of speculative thought in search of the solid basis of the true, the gospel would appear as the unveiling to the eager eyes of man of that very truth which they so long and fruitlessly sought.

To every age the gospel would appear clad in a form suited to the times, yet always presenting in fact the same sovereign remedy, without which the soul-life of man must wither.

In the fluctuations and ceaseless ebbings of thought and phrase of passing centuries this word of God has been tried. It has been sifted by the cavils and oppositions of sceptics and unbelievers; it has been tried and dishonoured by the perversions and misinterpretations of false friends; it has been slandered and assailed by open enemies; and more, it has been tested by the all-undermining hand of ever-fickle time, and it still survives. It has been attacked by calumny and fraud which have slain their thousands of human systems; it has been proved by time, which has overthrown its ten thousands; and it is here to-day—such as it was in every changing age—the hope, the guide, the con-

solation of Christ's serving and waiting children : 'Thy word is tried to the uttermost, therefore thy servant loveth it.'

The word of God has been tried, and not found wanting. It has been proved equal to the demand which successive eras have put forth, and it is instructive to men who live in an age of much activity and inquiry to observe the way in which the word of God has shown itself equal to the exigencies of its past trying positions. We propose to illustrate this by reference to one particular era—that of the Reformation.

The term is a wide one, and we use it in its widest meaning ; but all who have read the story of the age must have soon understood some, at least, of its peculiarities. The public thought of Europe had long been under the influence of that extraordinary class of men, called the schoolmen—men who, more than others, succeeded in overlaying the sim-

plicity of the gospel, and who by the most subtle intellectual legerdemain laid the foundation of that scheme of scholastic casuistry which by its frequent refinements and numberless distinctions caused the boundaries of virtue so nearly to approximate to those of vice, that the purest were polluted, and the most guileless ensnared.

Under the guidance of these theological anatomists, all the warmth of a true religion evaporated. In their keen and searching demonstrations of the structure of theology, they sacrificed the life of faith. From their operating-rooms they sent forth whole dictionaries of theological and refined phrases which deluged the class-rooms, and even the streets, of Europe. They erected unwieldy and tiresome systems of divinity, full of all the most fictitious notions, and abounding in rules and maxims of law and conscience to govern all conceivable cases. Under their auspices, dexterity

was more sought for than sincerity—subtleness of thought more than honesty of heart. Men were keener to hear the cause of doubtful morality pleaded in the schools than to listen to the voice of conscience speaking in their hearts. The question was more what the law of the Church allowed than what the Bible prohibited. The apparently express words of Scripture might, under the adroit manipulation of these dexterous advocates, be shown to be misunderstood. The words of God might seem clear, but they could not be held so until the case had been submitted to the ingenious casuistry and special pleading of men who were trained to detect distinctions or refine away differences. In such an age it was no wonder that every one who thought at all would be influenced by the spirit of the times. Men became apt at evasions, and ready at quibbles. The moral teaching of the Bible became transformed into a vast

legal system, full of tortuous windings, and startling contradictions, and obvious wrongs. Men were satisfied and pleased with the frequent exercise of their ingenuity which such a state of things called for. They argued, they refined, they appealed to precedents, they subtilized, they darkened fact with hypotheses, they obscured truth with equivocations, they stifled evidence with barbarous phraseology. The spirit of the lawyer was abroad.

It was natural when in such an age a grand moral and religious movement took place that the controversy which ensued should be conducted in the kind of language which prevailed ; and that awkwardly contested arguments, which to us seem feeble and pointless, should carry with them mysterious weight. It was natural that in an age saturated with lawyer-like refinements and notions, a judicial phraseology should become general.

To the Bible the Reformers appealed; but their appeal would, humanly speaking, have lost in force, could not the Bible answer when interrogated in a style and phrase harmonizing with the current fashion. The Providence which foresaw the end from the beginning had prepared the fitting weapon, and had stored it in its armoury against the evil day; and when the champions of a purer faith came to the treasury in search of a brand suited to the needs of their age, they found, in the writings of St. Paul, the sword they sought—its edge whetted to the keenness which was required. They found ready to hand the Gospel set forth under all those judicial emblems and phrases which exactly suited the subtle, lawyerlike temper of the times.

They preached the Gospel; but they preached it in a way which men could understand. That which was most frequently on their lips was the metaphor which a litigious theology could under-

stand; they spoke of justification by faith. Under their teaching, sin was set forth chiefly as implying guilt, and man was arraigned as a guilty prisoner at the bar of a justice more searching and more stainless than man could conceive, and before a judge who would by no means clear the guilty. Guilty and condemned, this was man's position—looking vainly around for any plea to put forth, or any way of escape from the dread sentence which must fall upon him. Then salvation appeared. What could not be by effort, or merit, or works, might be by grace and faith. Mercy pointed out the way of escape. A dying Saviour cleanses from sin ; and righteousness and peace kiss each other. For this mode of representing the Gospel the Bible furnished an ample vocabulary, and the writings of St. Paul were peculiarly rich in it.

Men were all guilty before God ; they had no plea to offer ; every mouth was

stopped in its efforts at self-justification, for all had gone out of the way. None were righteous, no, not one ; in the highest and in the lowest, in the holiest and in the most abandoned, the taint and the guilt of sin were to be seen. By the mere efforts of man no plea could be fashioned. ‘By the works of the law no flesh could be justified.’

But what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,—what the law could not do, because the endless and intricate ramifications of man’s guilt caused every expedient and plea in law to break down,—what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, that God did by His Son. Sentence was passed upon sin—in that Christ died. Justification is offered to man in that Christ died and rose again for him. We are justified by faith; the accusation has been withdrawn ; we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

None who have studied the scholastic

and legal-witted temper of pre-Reformation times, can fail to see how wonderfully this particular mode of setting forth the Gospel was suited to the age, and was fitted to lay hold upon minds for which a legal aspect of things was fascinating, perhaps even indispensable.

None can refuse gratitude to God that for those most trying times He had prepared His weapons against the persecutors, and in the victory of His truth has assured us of the strength and stability of that word which has been tried to the uttermost.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MORE RECENT PHASES.

THE revolutions of human thought have cast our lot in different times. The judicial aspect of things is not so prevalent. Men's minds are fuller of the discoveries of science, and the progress of experimental philosophy, than the moral refinements and immoral distinctions of a scholastic age ; the scientific thought of the day makes itself felt in the phraseology, which we hear around us ; and theology no longer dresses herself in judicial, but seeks to array herself in raiment fitted to the times.

It is not to be marvelled at, that in an age, when schemes of practical benevolence are rife, and actual results of

every enterprise are eagerly looked for; when men are devout utilitarians in everything, that art should be realistic, and every divinity should be practical. Still less is it to be wondered at that those forms of representing the gospel which have the air of law, should be set aside for others more congenial to our modes of thought. It is not strange that such a practical age should exhibit impatience (I venture to think a causeless one) of the judicial view of things as of an aspect savouring rather of a legal fiction than of practical good. Accordingly the notion of sin is hardly so much that of ideal guilt, as of a real evil. We are not so much to be viewed as criminals under accusation; but as those suffering from real infection. Sin is a disease, which is eating away the life of our spirits. The question is not, 'How shall I get rid of this guilt?' but 'Who will heal this disease?'

And for this aspect we find Scripture

ready with its answer. As when the groaning souls of men in past days burdened with a sense of guilt looked round in vain for deliverance, the Gospel came forward, pointing to the crucified Lord, who stood near to justify; so now when the sin-smitten soul inquires in its feverish agony for one to rebuke the torments of his disease, the gospel stands near and points to Him, out of whom flows virtue to heal them all. She takes up the thoughts of men's hearts, and shows them the widespread character of the disease—she shows men that in this aspect sin has been presented in early times—that Isaiah had described the iniquities of Israel as appearing in the body of the nation like 'wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores' (Isa. i. 5); that Jeremiah, as he surveyed the fallen and sin-prostrate state of his countrymen, pathetically cried (viii. 22) after the healer: 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there? why then is the health

of the daughter of my people not recovered ?'—that in this light the Psalmist had regarded his sins, complaining that he was feeble and sore smitten, and 'there was no whole part in his body'—and that the Redeemer had sanctioned the thought, when in one breath He proclaimed Himself the Saviour of the Lost, and the Physician of the Sick. They that are whole need not a Physician ; but they that are sick : I came not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to repentance ; and when He announced, in the language of evangelical prediction that He had come to preach recovery of sight to the blind : the healing of the sick, the binding up of the broken-hearted (Luke iv. 18).

Time would fail us to cite the numberless instances in which Scripture has described sin as a disease. The assertion that Christ Jesus is its efficient Healer it is our object in these pages to illustrate ; but the full force of His

'Healing Power' can only be fully understood by those who have sought out the healer, and experienced in themselves the healing of this plague.

Two cautions are necessary.

I. No metaphors, no one set of ideas, can adequately represent the whole truth of God. The judicial aspect of sin is not the whole truth of the matter: neither is what we venture to call the medical. The truth of God cannot be bounded by the horizon of man's vision, still less by the imperfect chains of human language. Error is sure to ensue where men press any one metaphor unfairly. The most superficial thinker can see that there are points in the judicial aspect of sin, where the analogy fails; and that the obstinate application of metaphor in some points, not only fails, but ultimately neutralizes the earlier parallels. Nor will better success be met with in pressing the other comparison unduly: it too will snap under

a severely rigorous application. These analogies are good so long as they are used as the Almighty intended them, as illustrations ; but when indefinite arguments are grounded on the basis of an imperfect illustration, the result will be confusion and despair.

II. But though we enter this caution we most fully believe that the analogies, which Scripture has sanctioned, are true, though inadequate. Used as illustrations, they are intended to throw some light upon the subject, and present a view of truth which finds an echo in the heart of man. Now one view may be popular, and after a while another, but neither can safely be neglected, for both represent needs of the human soul. Now man may look coldly on a judicial view of sin, but the view will reassert itself, and will continue to do so as long as justice, guilt, and pardon are not mere words, but are representatives

of true thoughts and living instincts in men.

Ere long men may be decrying the thought of sin as a real, present malady, and be so eager for forgiveness that they may be heedless of holiness ; but the neglect will be followed by retribution if not by reaction, when the plague of present sin breaks out and makes itself felt. But those who take God's word as their guide will never sunder the things which God has made one ; and the man who is forgiven will most earnestly seek to be made like unto His Saviour, while he who thirsts most after holiness will never forget that the cross of Christ assures him of his forgiveness.

One thought of practical consolation rises out of these reflections. There is a fulness and a fitness in Christ and His word suited to all and every change of the world and the need of man.

When conscience is torn and bur-

dened with the accusations of the past, He appears as the sin-bearer: when the pain and grief of present sin trouble them, He is ready to rebuke the fever of sin; let what views will prevail, He appears all-sufficient. He is the Truth which all philosophers crave. In days when diplomatic language prevails, He is the Ratifier of the peace, and the Mediator of the covenant. The thoughts of a military era can contemplate the Captain of our salvation, and Leader of the hosts of the Lord.

In all the changing thoughts and words of men and ages, His word has been tried, and He has been trusted, and not trusted in vain.

Will not you, O reader, trust Him? You may not be able to apprehend every view of His love and His work; but can you not perceive the fitness of one view suited to the needs of your heart?

You may find a difficulty in under-

standing one aspect, but there is another more suited to your case.

You may not be able to look upon Him as the scapegoat bearing away your sins to a far-off wilderness, but you can look to Him as lifted up to give healing to the diseased. You may not be able to weep at His feet, or feel the love of the Magdalene impelling you to kiss His feet, but you can draw near to Him as the sick ones of old to touch, if it be but the hem of His robe.

Whatever view most attracts you, draw near, and you will find new fields of love breaking forth upon your gaze, and new reasons for your love, new motives for your zeal. Trust Him—for He has been tried. Take Him at His word ; and you will learn to love that word, for it has been tried and purified seven times in the fire.

CHAPTER IX.

HINDRANCES TO HEART-HEALING.

THE story of the paralytic at Bethesda will illustrate some of the hindrances to Heart-Healing. Few incidents have received more elaborately ingenious handling than this. The pool or tank of Bethesda, the five porches, the troubled water, the descending angel, the in-stepping invalid—all in their turn have been pressed into the service of piety by the wildest and most untutored fancy. The ingenious lovers of allegory have seized each part of the narrative, and have given it a tongue. The ‘Pool’ is the world; round its margin are gathered the wailing multitudes watching in eager expectation for a deliverer. At length the

surface of society is stirred. The Messiah has descended ; virtue to heal mankind is imparted ; like the streams about Jericho, the barren waters are touched into vigour, and the disorders of society may be healed. Or the ‘Pool’ is the human heart—sluggish and impotent—sentinelled by the five senses, each of which is degraded by diseased imaginings—till at length the heavenly influence descends and stirs the motives, the fears, the hopes, the miseries, or joys of the soul ; and then, one by one, the diseased senses of the man are restored to purity and heavenly energy.

Allegorical applications of this kind may be carried on to an almost indefinite extent ; and though no doubt many pious reflections and profitable lessons may be gleaned, yet it is always a questionable method of dealing with the Scriptures, for it makes imagination the prophet of our religious life, to whose lofty but arbitrary directions we submit

the guidance of our souls. It is, indeed, a puerile demand on the part of some, that we should utterly abandon the use of our imagination. As a gift of the Most High, it may well be employed to heighten our devotional feelings. But the true function of imagination, it should be borne in mind, is that of a handmaid to reason and will, and she should be called forth only after these have laid the foundations and erected the solid masonry of our undertaking. The teachings of the facts which Scripture records, should be drawn forth first by careful attention and painstaking thought and prayer. Then, disciplined by truth, let us summon to our aid that enchantress which can enable us to unite the facts of a long past with the experience of to-day, by graphically realizing the men of history as men, its places as the places, its facts as veritable transactions, and not obsolete myths or fruitless fairy tales.

If we pay attention to the leading

hints of the sacred historian we shall not lose, I think, anything in vivid interest, still less of practical and soul-helping truth. Doubtless, Bethesda is a picture of the world ; but not by reason of a strained allegory, but because the men of every clime and race are in root principles, notwithstanding external dissimilarities of custom, men like those we meet with every day in business, in society, in private intercourse, or public undertakings. The main features of human nature are very much the same in all ages. Like the portraits in the galleries of our most ancient families, though the costumes and the fashions exhibit enormous varieties, the strong family likeness may be traced through the lapse of centuries. The characteristics of the multitudes who crowded into the cloisters at Bethesda exhibit marks which you will recognise in the busy nineteenth century. We can trace the general disposition of mankind — the

spasmodic and intermittent benevolence which the world, particularly the English world, exhibits or approves ; we can listen to the querulous complaints of lethargic invalidism, and the hopeless despondency of distrustful humanity. In grand contrast to all this, the Benefactor of our world appears. Calm and kind amid the confusion of clamorous haste and selfish eagerness, tenderly sympathetic and unreservedly catholic in His mercy ; giving largely and unchidingly where men suggest parsimony and discontent, exercising a firmness to control the excited irritation of nervous despondency, and restoring the unstrung patient to full, vigorous, self-restrained, active, and trusting manhood.

It has been questioned, and there appears small prospect of any decision being given, whether we are to suppose that St. John, in speaking of the angel who troubled the water of the pool, describes what actually took place, or

whether he is simply recording what was popularly believed — whether the healing properties of this pool of water were supernaturally imparted by an occasionally heaven-sent messenger, or whether the eruption of some naturally medicated water into the bed of the pool at certain intervals charged it with restorative power sufficient for the cure of one person. Practically, the determination of this question does not affect the point which St. John brings out in the story, when he throws into contrast the broad and universal beneficence of Christ with the limited, restricted mercy which the invalids at Bethesda looked and contended for. The religious beliefs of men have been largely impregnated with a narrow and exclusive spirit. The so-called good things of the world, the favours, profits, and preferments which the eyes of diseased humanity glitter with an unholy eagerness to possess, cannot be won by all. Life, from the worldly

point of view, is a race which many run, but one receiveth the prize. The consequence of this knowledge is unseemly strife and noisy jealousy, tumultuous bickerings and mutually interfering violence. To step down first into the advantageous situation is the aim of each ; and the sufferers, poor, crippled, panting, and dying, jostle, and crowd, and elbow friend and foe out of the nearest way. The spirit is transferred to religion. Pride likes to have God to itself ; and therefore seeks to represent the mercy of the Almighty decked out in the narrow robes of her miserable and stunted conceptions. The friendless one may languish for well-nigh two-score years. Each wrapt in selfishness and conceit ignores the emaciated brother who lies sorely dispirited with many a vain attempt—the slave of a heart-sickness born of hope deferred. To the forgotten and friendless the Healer, the Deliverer comes. He teaches in His very compassionate-

ness to distinguish between the truth of God and the fictions of men. The great Father loves, indeed, with an especial love, His children. His eyes are over them; His ears are open to their prayers. He is careful for their safety, and will avenge their wrongs. But He is no respecter of persons. Man, surrounded by friends of rank, power, and talent, is but man, and no more to Him. At the far distance of heaven from earth, of the divinely holy from the sinful, He does not think but of human need. The want, the sorrow, the loneliness of His creatures, is an appeal to His love. His mercy is not strained ; it falls fast and soft, often unnoted by those preoccupied with their selfish adventures. The needy, however, see Him come. Upon the ear of the poor, sick-hearted, and desolate even to despair, there falls the question of love, 'Wilt thou be made whole ?'

(1.) *The question was a strange one.*
The poor man was inflicted with a griev-

ous, wearying, if not painful disease. To be released from the sense of utter exhaustion, the nerveless and monotonous days of the bondage of sickness ; to move about among his fellow-men, free, strong, and active,—this surely was what he wished. Was not he at the tank-side for the very purpose ? Were not his own tardy movements which let others step in before him, the very cross of his life ? Had he not times without number made the painful effort to get the healing benefit of the waters ? Did not his broken frame and languid eye speak his need ? Did not time, place, circumstances, point to the question, Wilt thou be made whole ? as superfluous ? Yet it was not superfluous. The Lord of life and love has asked it. There is some moral good designed in those words.

This design it is not impossible to conjecture. None who are even slightly acquainted with sickness can be igno-

rant of its demoralizing influence on the will. It is wonderful to see the strong man, accustomed to direct others with unerring judgment, and to control his fellow-men with invincible will, robbed in an instant of his very manhood by disease. In the hand of that awful scourge the very interest in life dies out, and often the wish for recovery. The means of restoration, the medicine, and food, are taken with indifference, often with reluctance. Desire of health has degenerated into a feeble, hazy instinct. This, I believe, is a result especially of disorders, such as that of the palsied man, belonging to the class Asthenic. In fevers or sthenic diseases, the passions and wishes may flame with a preternatural energy; but in diseases of a debilitating character, the moral powers are enfeebled with the languor of the frame: mind, and feeling, and will, are weak: the patient desires nothing, except to be let alone. In such cases

the Physician will most anxiously watch for the symptoms of returning interest. Low-voiced, he will converse in the room of the most stirring topics of the day, his eye keen to detect the faintest sign of emotion or attention on the part of the patient. He seeks to rouse the moral powers to co-operate. Their exercise he covets as almost indispensable to recovery.

To such an end I venture to suggest Christ's question was directed. Thirty-eight years of suffering, embittered by frequent disappointments, were enough to have reduced the most sanguine temperament to the veriest hopelessness. As hope fades, desire weakens; and listlessness, the most fatal enemy of restoration, will almost infallibly supervene. In such a state this sick man seemed to be, and I think we can catch the undertone of that miserable condition sounding through the reply: 'I have no man to put me in the way of even the

chance of recovery.' How untold must have been the forlorn and listless state of the sufferer may be conjectured when we remember that this half-querulous, half-despondent speech was made after Christ had quickened his thoughts and roused his interest by the sudden question, 'Wilt thou be made whole?'

Before passing on to investigate the difficulties in the way of his cure, which were present to the invalid's mind, let us turn our attention to the religious aspects of the present train of thought. One obstacle to the recovery of this paralytic consisted in the difficulty of exciting the interest and co-operation of his own will. The progress of the disease combined with frequent mortifications to numb the moral powers. Though everything in the incident suggested that the man considered recovery most desirable, yet practically the wish, the will, the interest, the desire needed, to be stirred up. Is there

not a similar state to be met with in the matter of religious conviction? Men are found in vast numbers attendant on the means of grace. Few there are who are so far gone in unbelief that they contemptuously turn away from the opportunities of salvation. There are large numbers of persons who are very close to the chance of soul-healing, and yet are strangely thwarted in some one point. They believe in the healing power of the Gospel ; they are fully persuaded that the disease of sin is terribly and relentlessly destructive ; they feel that the salvation of their spirits is beyond all doubt desirable ; they are willing to be saved. But it is with an enfeebled, languid wish. It is born of a hazy and occasional thought of the far-off future—the awful and unknown dark of desolation, the sunless solitudes of the lost, and the fair, flowering realms of eternal light. With occasional intermittent wish, stirred by some angel's hands ; they

start to reach the healing flood—only to be thwarted by some comrade in misery, or deterred by some casual obstacle. There is not sufficient strong persistency of purpose, vigour, and sincerity of will. Disease—that awful disease of sin, has enfeebled the high and lofty will of primeval and unfallen man. Deliverance from the wrath to come is at intervals pantingly sought; but in the matters of holiness, purer life, the will is languid—the wish pulseless. The demoralized nature is listless in good and almost incapable of a desire for emancipation from sin. Heaven is deemed desirable; but the wish to be forgiven, the longing to feel reconciled, the aspiring after the holiness, these are scarcely experienced. Deliverance from the ruin which sin entails is fondly hoped for; but deliverance from this present evil world is a wish scarcely understood.

To such the question, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ may be applied with

force and benefit. Are all these transient wishes sincere? When the passing desire for God's grace sweeps over the soul, and the wish for something nobler than earth's toys is felt, is it linked with the yearning to have sin rooted out? Are we content to let the Saviour draw near, and dash our cherished idols to the ground, and dislodge from the empire of our being the favourite sin, which has held us in thraldom? Are our minds set upon righteousness, or do we only desire to lay the dark anticipations of the future, that we may continue awhile uninterrupted in the pursuit of ungodly gains, unhallowed imaginings, and unsanctified pleasures? It is well to weigh these questions, for there is an offer of moral purgation, painful to the flesh, but fatal to every loved sin, which lives within the words, 'Wilt thou be made whole?'

(2.) *The question seemed to answer its purpose;* for though we can trace the appearance of despondency in the reply,

we can see that the desire to be made whole, however morbidly dormant before, is really quickened. Vividly his utter helplessness comes before his mind. He lies there friendless and suffering—the means of cure, just as it seems to him, beyond his reach. He is not reluctant to be made well ; but he is very painfully aware of the difficulties which environ him. The sense of those difficulties, the interest of attention dawning across the sick man's face, the light of trust stealing into those listless eyes—they are enough for the Saviour. The listlessness of mind has been dispersed, the languor of body will be overcome—'Arise and walk.'

It is necessary to distinguish between reluctance and the hindrance arising from felt difficulties. There are many who make difficulties about religion, because they are reluctant to enter upon the self-denying life of true faith. They would believe if they could only see clearly on

this matter of doctrine, or be satisfied on this point of Christian evidence. It is not for us to judge any save ourselves ; yet it is noticeable that speculative questions are frequently repressed by Christ, and some practical subject brought into view. ‘Are there few that be saved ?’ is instantly met with advice to the questioners to make their own calling and election sure. ‘Strive to enter in at the strait gate.’ While, however, it is always well to bring the practical aspects of religion into prominence, it is not well to ignore, still less to deny, the existence of difficulties. There are many whose arena of conflict is the mind. Pure in life, comparatively free from the moral temptations which assail mankind, they are perpetually called upon to wage war against doubts, which rise like spectres, breaking in upon much coveted peace. These mental trials are often partly intellectual and partly experimental. Old conceptions throw dark shadows athwart

the mind, and hinder the reception of the peace-giving truth ; a painful torturing distrust, generated by many mistakes, haunts the spirit.

Of such difficulties the sufferer in the story may afford an illustration. The Healer, sovereign in His power and compassionate in His love, is standing before him, and offering him restoration : ‘Wilt thou be made whole ?’ But the sufferer is blind to the full meaning of the question. It serves to call up the past, all his hopeless endeavours to reach the pool, the selfishness of the multitudes, his own helplessness. Instead of perceiving that the drift of the question is an offer on Christ’s part, he breaks out into the language of despondency. He would like to be made whole ; but there is the difficulty of reaching the spot—the unlikelihood of meeting with some kind friend to help him down the steps. So he runs on with his complaint, half wistful, half querulous, thankful for the

inquiry, but little hopeful of cure ; while all the while the Healer, powerful and merciful, is standing by, ready to bless. The same kind of dulness is a frequent experience of spiritual life among those who are not reluctant to be rescued. The difficulties are so many to them. They have no faith : they wish they could believe. If only they had some power to move into closer proximity to the source of spiritual health. There is power in the gospel to heal and to satisfy, that they know ; but they have no strength of faith to draw near to its influence. No man to put them into the pool. It is more than they can do to reach it. They need not go. Christ has come to them. He it is who asks, ‘Wilt thou be made whole ?’

(3.) *Note the way Christ heals.* With a word of command, which inspires the energy of obedience : ‘Rise and walk.’ It is the exercise of simple authority. Over a man low and desponding; with a

disposition to look upon his own case as hopeless, there is no elaborate reasoning, no preparation for the cure, no delay, no word which might invite a doubt. There is a simple, absolute word of command. He knew that the man was sincerely desirous of being healed. He could read the heart, and perhaps saw the contrition and self-reproach for the sin which had wrought him such misery. He perceived the working of that poor laden spirit. Perhaps the thought of the sufferer was, that the sin which had met such terrible retribution was still unforgiven of heaven. Bitterly barbed taunts of the tempter were shot through his soul. He was an outcast—marked in his misery with the brand of his transgression. There was no help, no hope for such as he. Then close by there was help, but just out of reach; he was doomed to strain and strive for salvation, friendless and in vain. But he is not friendless : *he will not wish in vain : he need not*

strive : he is not an outcast : it is a mistake. The vehemence of the Saviour's mighty love with authoritative word convinces him that it is not so. 'Arise and walk !' He is healed !

To those distressed in heart, sincerely wishing for salvation—hating sin, but thinking they can never reach the healing stream—the same method must be applied. The absolute promises—the authoritative word of Christ, alone can rouse them from the hypochondriasis of spiritual despondency. 'Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.' 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' 'All things are ready.' 'Arise and walk.' Go about as a Christian. Work for Christ. He has healed your backsliding. He has loved you freely.

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